\\\\---Birdseed Chronicle---////

-----Ari Rice-----

Like any other morning in March, the sun had thrown its modest light against the ever-barren earth and the chill of winter still lingered in the air. It was 10 am when Ari stepped outside clad in his usual pair of slippers. He made sure to close the door behind him as he picked up the 12-pound bag of sunflower seeds. At one point he almost fell after stumbling on a patch of melting snow, yet he still somehow managed to regain his balance.

This bag happened to be Ari’s last store of birdseed. It was only the previous Sunday when he purchased it, and his previous food stockpile had apparently been ruined by mealworms. As if these complications weren’t enough, Ari found it difficult buying replacement seed since the nearest **Wild Birds Unlimited©** lay almost twenty miles out of his usual range. And it wasn’t like he ever had the time to purchase bird food anyway.

Ari himself was just another newly-enlightened birder, and he still showed some difficulty telling robins from larks. His passion, however, was something unmatched. Like ornithologists of the 18th Century, he began by drawing every bird he saw. He pursued his subjects diligently, and with great enthusiasm did he check off species on his list. But when it came to viewing these splendid birds, he was no happier simply watching them from his kitchen window.

He now held the bag like a child’s brand new Christmas present. The very contents of this bag held endless possibilities. What would it bring him? Chickadees, nuthatches, titmice –Ari had seen the majority since he began putting out food almost two weeks ago. And then of course, there were the cardinals that always showed up right before dusk. Ari loved those. More than anything, however, Ari wanted to see something new; something unusual; and by all means he desired to see an EVENING GROSBEAK. The thought only occurred to him while he was flipping through the pages of his newest field guide. He just so happened to spot the bird on page 486 when the Grosbeak’s plumage suddenly drew his attention. Liquid gold color, white on black wings, giant yellow beak…the bird looked almost too gaudy to be real, and yet Ari still longed to see it.

With the promise of a Grosbeak at his feeder, Ari eagerly opened the bag and filled up the seed tray- But little did he know of the menace that was hiding just beyond his vision. Little did he know of the event that was about to take place. This villain, as a matter of fact, was simply staring down at Ari from his residence almost two houses away, and he was by no means an ordinary human stalker. This was an expert thief- a rogue with his whole life’s experience in stealing and plundering. Never once had he been caught, and now this marauder was after Ari’s birdseed.

As soon as Ari left, this thief was upon the bird feeder. He was not hungry -not by his style of eating- but with tiny hands he quickly managed to stuff his face. One after another, each seed disappeared and an empty husk dropped to the ground. Without a single change in expression, he came to think about what to do with the stolen bounty. Perhaps bury it? Or simply hoard it back at home? His family had a very good reputation for hoarding food. Every member was descended from a single ancestor- the first to move into Ari’s neighborhood. This particular thief and the rest of his clan had been plundering birdfeeders for longer than any of them could remember. How he got past that neighbor’s incessantly barking dog was due to a certain ability this thief possessed- an ability shared by all family members, all cousins, and every other relative across the world.

He had approached slowly and cautiously: surveying the area for any signs of danger. He was hidden high out of sight; crouched like a waiting assassin. Seeing no imminent threats, the thief descended further from his lofty perch. He would have to scale a wall to achieve his well-deserved prize.

It really wasn’t much of a wall. If it had been designed with the intent to keep out ravaging animals and thieves, it would have been higher, stronger, and most definitely made of barbed wire. What doesn’t barbed wire keep out? This mere fence was only for décor. Birds flew over it day in and day out. Rabbits found it especially easy to tunnel underneath and access greener grass. Any wanderer with an IQ of 10 could have simply opened the wooden gate with a click. Yet the thief still chose to scamper over it- a simple display of agility.

The one-page instruction booklet told Ari that he would have to wait before he saw any new birds at his feeder. Like any restaurant in the real business, Ari’s feeder would have to attract some attention before its feathered guests would begin to favor it. Three days would go by as the seed lay untouched. Only after these three days passed did a perky chickadee decide to stop by for a bite. Liking the food, the chickadee eventually brought his friends over. They brought more friends. And more friends. By the time our antagonist arrived, Ari’s single feeder had turned into an all-day eatery. Almost every day, it was filled with snacking cardinals, dove gourmets, finicky goldfinches, hit-and-run nuthatches, fast-food sparrows, and the drunken rabble-rousing blackbirds.

Frightened guests took to the trees at the sight of the thief. The few sparrows that remained eating were forcefully shoved aside as the thief took his spoils. Several of them still found cover in the nearby dogwood shrub. Ari however, was mortified after watching the spectacle from his window. He banged on the window in hopes of scaring off the disruptive creature. He banged three times and yelled, but the thief continued eating. Twice, he looked in Ari’s direction- staring back with black, soulless eyes. It was a strange look this thief possessed: not so mean or fearful in this instance, but something acknowledging yet remorseless. An imaginary smirk appeared on the thief’s face- a smirk that only boasted of conquest. It was no surprise when he spoke, for the words on his lips were of similar nature: “I win, loser.”

In spite of his struggling efforts, Ari’s dreams of running a feeding station were crushed by the nimble thieves who mocked him. His feeder remained in pieces and the grain lay spilled like blood on a battlefield. Looking back on that day, he sees a flowering yard filled with birds- and the terrible thief who ruined every bit of it. Since that very occasion, Ari had stopped using birdseed. His broken feeder now lies in disuse.

Birds in the trees finally fled as Ari stormed outside. Far before the confrontation took place, Ari knew he would lose. Even though he possessed the superior brain, the innocent-looking rogue was simply no match for his kind-hearted nature. Peaceful negotiations would fail as the thief only mocked him further. By now of course, this thief had scampered up a tree to relative safety. He knew what he was doing. In one last display of anger, Ari picked up a stone and threw it at his offender.

Ari knew he was fighting a lost cause. The stone barely missed as the marauder bared his yellow teeth. The thief merely learned how to recognize his enemy. He would come back. He would raze the entire yard and strip the feeders of their food. He would gather his friends and cause mayhem. He would chew his way into the wooden framework of Ari’s house, slash open the remaining bags of birdseed, and devour more food. Even after dispersing, the thief and his newly found mate would return next year to raise three additional thieves- more thieves to plunder Ari’s feeders. Ari himself would learn a new lesson: There is no reasoning with squirrels.

This story succeeds in creating ambiguity, and utilizes good metaphors. The interaction between the squirrel and Ari needs to be more pronounced. Minimal symbolism that needs to be more defined. Too subtle, to be understood by average reader.